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ABSTRACT

This paper examines implications of the movement toward inclusive schools for gifted and talented students, focusing on specific issues involved in considering whether or not gifted students should be served in a regular classroom setting. Key questions discussed include the ability of the regular classroom to meet the gifted student's needs, the impact on self-concept and other nonacademic factors of inclusion versus special classes, and the costs of serving gifted/talented students separately. Research addressing these questions is examined, and is generally found to support ability-level grouping as the most effective approach to meeting gifted students' cognitive and affective needs, although a shortage of empirical research on placements and outcomes of these students is noted. It is argued that the moral and philosophical arguments for inclusion of students with disabilities do not necessarily extend to inclusion of gifted and talented students, and that homogeneous grouping frequently provides the least restrictive environment for these students. (Contains 20 references.) (PB)

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CONCEPTS OF INCLUSION IN GIFTED EDUCATION

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Full inclusion as a movement has evolved at the federal level from the Regular Education Initiative (REI) and in-class interventions in Chapter 1 to state level regulations regarding special education. In some states gifted education falls under special education, and pressure has been exerted to redefine how gifted students are served. Even when gifted education has been perceived to be outside the realm of special education, economic pressures in local school districts have created situations in which gifted students are served within the regular classroom for increasing proportions of their school day.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) stipulates that children with disabilities must be provided a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (McCarthy, 1994). Children can be put in special classes only when the use of supplementary aids and services in the regular classroom cannot achieve a satisfactory education. Fully inclusive means that children are taught in the regular education classroom for the full day; support services are brought to the children rather than the child to a segregated setting.

Inclusion, however, is not mentioned in federal law; it is a state-of-the-art term that refers to placing children with disabilities in integrated sites (McCarthy, 1994). Moreover, there is no mention that such regulations apply to gifted and talented students. While gifted and talented programs may be covered under

special education in particular states, such placement is not uniform across the U.S.

Within gifted education there is great concern about the implications of the school reform movement for differentiated programs for the gifted. Renzulli and Reis (1991) have argued that the reform movement is leading to the reduction in the number of gifted programs, with a move toward ending tracking and homogeneous grouping. However, Purcell (1994) found that programs tend to be eliminated for reasons of funding, lack of advocacy, or the existence/nonexistence of state mandates--not because of movement toward the reintegration of special education within regular education.

Indeed, if one looks at judicial rulings about inclusion as applied to students with disabilities, the federal courts (McCarthy, 1994) have determined that the focus of the intervention is on where the student can receive an "appropriate" education that meets his or her needs and that "any setting, including a regular classroom, that prevents a child from receiving an appropriate education..., is not the LRE for that individual child." In particular, in determining whether a child should be placed in the regular classroom, schools may consider 1) the student's ability to grasp the regular education curriculum, 2) the nonacademic benefits that would accrue to the child, 3) the effect of the student on the general education program and other students, and 4) the cost of various interventions.

In applying such standards to the gifted and talented, educators ought to consider those four factors in evaluating where a gifted student is best served. First, can the regular classroom function effectively to meet the needs of the gifted student? While Archambault (1993) has argued that little research has been conducted on what happens to the gifted child in the regular classroom, others have found disturbing evidence of neglect. In a study of regular education teachers Reis, Renzulli, and Westberg (1994) found that 61% of public school teachers and 54% of private school teachers reported that they had **never** had any training in teaching gifted students. Further, in a follow-up study those same authors found that gifted students experienced **no instructional or curricular differentiation in 84% of the instructional activites in which they participated**. Research indicates that gifted and talented students need more than what can be provided in full inclusion models or traditional pull-out gifted programs in regular classrooms (Burns, 1994).

What is needed is a reconceptualization of the regular classroom (and perhaps special programs) to accommodate the diverse needs of all learners, including the gifted (Dettmer, 1993; Jackson, 1993). Educators must be challenged to reorient their thinking to reevaluate instructional practices (Davis, 1990) as well as develop concrete models for innovations (Slavin, 1990). Student diversity is not a liability but an asset creating the driving force behind innovation and problem-solving (Skrtic, 1991). Whether learning occurs in the regular classroom or in specialized

programs for the gifted, teacher education programs must prepare teachers to individualize instruction to meet the needs of all students (Whitmore, 1983). Most cases of inappropriate interventions result from ignorance, not a conscious intent to ignore the needs of the gifted. The National Education Association has argued that pupils be placed in full inclusion only if teachers are prepared to assist them (McCarthy, 1994). Even within gifted and talented programs the range of abilities may be great; one program or educational design may not function appropriately for all gifted students. Teachers must be empowered to adapt programs (be they inclusion or pull-out) if the intended result is an improved school climate (Burns, 1994). Maker's (1982) model provides an excellent framework for modifying curricula for gifted students.

Second, what are the nonacademic benefits that accrue to the gifted and talented students through various models of intervention? How are the self-concepts of gifted and talented students impacted in a full inclusion model (Mathews, 1995)? Research indicates that homogeneous grouping allows for meaningful competition (Bloom, 1985), the reduction of arrogance (Stanley & Benbow, 1986) and inoculation from anti-intellectualism in the school culture (OERI, 1993). Others (Culross, 1995) have argued that the need to find true peers is often met only through differentiated programs for the gifted. Further, ability grouping

can play an important role in acclimating females and other underrepresented groups to the idea of choosing academically challenging environments (Callahan, 1979; Fox & Tobin, 1988). Before inclusive models are adopted, research is needed to evaluate the effects of such an intervention on the affective well-being of all students, both gifted and nongifted.

Third, what are the nonacademic benefits that accrue to gifted and talented students under inclusion? For example, how do the settings compare in their ability to meet social needs? Most efforts at inclusion have focused on the elementary school level. Inclusion at the high school and preschool levels involves a different set of issues, particularly when one notes that gifted students are least likely to be served in **any** program at either end of that developmental continuum. Gifted children and youth may experience uneven development across physical, cognitive, social, and emotional areas. While specialized academic programs may best meet cognitive needs, they may not necessarily meet other needs as well.

Fourth, cost remains an issue on several levels. Many special educators have expressed a concern that reintegrating special education with regular education may lead to a loss of funds to serve students with disabilities. Purcell (1994) has shown that funding for gifted students has been linked to state mandates to serve this unique population. Will moving gifted education under a model of inclusion result in reduced funding for gifted students? Similarly, in many instances where inclusion

has been implemented aides have been hired to supplement the work of the regular classroom teacher. Is such a practice viable in working with the gifted? Is inclusion less expensive?

Finally, what evidence is there to support the adoption of inclusion as a methodology for gifted education? Decisions to modify or eliminate programs for high achieving students should be based on research and a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of a program at the school and district level and not on trends in educational reform (Renzulli & Reis, 1991). Conclusions from research about inclusion done with students with disabilities may or may not have applicability to gifted and talented students (Cipani, 1995). In short, inclusive education as a methodology needs to move from a philosophical and moral debate to empirical testing. School psychologists trained as scientist-practitioners need to be at the forefront of insuring that decisions made about inclusion with gifted and talented students are based on the best available research.

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Biography
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Dr. Culross is a Professor at Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA where she teaches courses in counseling the gifted, creativity, educational psychology, and the nature and needs of giftedness. A licensed psychologist and nationally-certified school psychologist, she is the author of Counseling the gifted: Developing the whole child. She is a frequent presentor at NASP and holds B.A. (in teaching the gifted), M.S.Ed., and Ph.D. degrees from Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.